

Vote NO on the September 20 tentative agreement

Oppose the anti-democratic shutdown of the EMU faculty strike!

Matthew Brennan
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The shutting down of the Eastern Michigan University (EMU) faculty strike last week is an anti-democratic maneuver aimed at ramming through a concessions contract. EMU faculty should not only decisively reject the tentative agreement being voted on Tuesday, they should reject with contempt the process by which it is being rammed through by the union.

On September 11 the American Association of University Professors (EMU-AAUP) faculty union negotiators announced they had reached a tentative agreement and immediately shut down the weeklong strike by 500 tenured and tenure-track faculty at the school.

The AAUP bureaucracy, backed by its parent union the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), did not make the contract available to faculty prior to or during the announcement to the media, nor was the shutting down of the strike even put to a discussion or vote among the faculty members themselves.

Instead, the announcement was celebrated by both the university and the AAUP-AFT bureaucracy as a “victory,” before there was any serious review or discussion among the faculty, who were immediately sent back into the classrooms. With complete cynicism, the union executives, including AAUP President Mohamed El-Sayed and AFT President Randi Weingarten, hailed the sellout deal. Weingarten herself appeared at a rally at EMU’s campus in Ypsilanti on September 9, just two days before the strike was shut down.

Weingarten (annual salary of \$426,000), a member of the Democratic National Committee, has spent the past two years shutting down educators’ strikes and protests and herding teachers and students into COVID-infested schools.

Outrageously it took four days from the calling off of

the strike, until September 15, for the full contract to even be made available to the faculty for review. From there professors have just five days to review the document. This has allowed for no serious time for discussion of the contract.

All the details released to the press thus far indicate that by any serious measure the tentative agreement is a concessions contract. It will impose de facto wage decreases, provide no evident protection from exposure to COVID-19 in the classrooms, ensure increased health care costs, and it chips away at previous gains while setting a pattern for further concessions.

All indications are that the professors will be still paying substantial increases in out-of-pocket health care costs, particularly those who wish to keep the better PPO plan that many currently opt for. Increased PPO costs will thus pressure many members to enroll into HMOs which saves the university money and in turn offers less coverage to faculty and their families.

The union claims the zero-cost HMO program “could save participating faculty up to over \$3,000 a year for family coverage.” Nowhere is the quality and access to care even raised in the official statements, nor why the university suddenly changed its tune about not supporting “hard cap” payments. The reports also indicate that dental coverage costs will increase across the board. The claim that the negotiated health care coverage is a “victory” because now faculty will have the same plans as administrators is meaningless, since many administrators are some of the highest paid personnel on campus. EMU President James Smith, for instance, has an annual salary of \$455,000. He can certainly manage the increased out-of-pocket contributions to the PPO!

In terms of wages, the current proposal calls for pay increases of 4 percent, or \$4,000 in base pay, during the

first year, and 3.5 percent in the second and third years. The parties agreed to reopen the contract to discuss salaries in the fourth year, which guarantees nothing. Even the claim that the lowest paid faculty will in some years receive 7.4 percent increases does not address the elephant in the room: All of these increases fall significantly below the current annual 8-9 percent inflation rate. This means the touted raises are in reality a de facto pay cut.

The proposal also comes after consecutive one-year contract extensions, agreed to by the AAUP, that included pay raises of only 1.75 percent in 2020 and 1.6 percent in 2021. These were also below the rate of inflation and again amounted to de facto wage cuts. During that same period there was a 7 percent increase in health care costs as well.

The increased health care costs combined with below inflation level pay raises will not only slash pay for tenured faculty but will set the pattern for concessions to be imposed on non-tenured faculty.

Adding insult to injury, faculty will now pay for on-campus parking, which had previously been free.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread sickness, the agreement contains no mitigation measures to protect the faculty, staff or students. This under conditions of an increase in daily COVID-19 cases as well as deaths, with conditions only set to worsen as classrooms are reopened under the “let COVID rip” policy of the Democrats and Republicans.

The entire manner in which the negotiations were conducted speaks to a conspiracy against the faculty by the AAUP, which never put forward any concrete demands based on educators’ needs leading up to negotiations. Instead their “rallying cry” was “Settle the damn contract.” As the talks progressed, the union made “counteroffers” that only handed more and more concessions to university management.

At no point has the AAUP sought to link up and broaden the struggle of the faculty by uniting with other sections of educators or health care workers coming into struggle, such as with the 6,200 Michigan Medicine nurses currently without a contract across town, striking service workers or EMU university lecturers, who will face similar attacks when their contract expires next year.

This set the stage for the betrayal of the strike, after a judge, a Democratic appointee, denied EMU’s request for a temporary restraining order to end the strike, while setting a hearing date a week later to again review the issue of imposing an injunction. This was a tactical

maneuver by the judge and the Democratic Party, who have chosen to rely on the union to impose the massive concessions demanded by the administration.

The reliance by the Democratic Party on the AAUP bureaucracy to betray the struggle by EMU faculty is being done out of concern that open government strikebreaking by the Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s administration could backfire under conditions of a growing strike wave across the country and with the mid-term elections just weeks away. Similar union-organized strikebreaking operations are happening across the country, including the recent sellout of the Seattle teachers strike by the Seattle Education Association (SEA).

EMU faculty members should reject the sellout tentative agreement and begin the fight to take the conduct of their struggle out of the hands of the pro-management union executives by forming a rank-and-file committee. This committee would raise demands based on what the faculty actually need and want. It would coordinate with other workers in struggle—the Michigan Medicine nurses, striking Minnesota nurses, railroad workers and many others—as part of a nationwide and international movement of workers against the assault on living standards and working conditions.

EMU faculty should take note of the campaign of Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman for UAW president. Lehman is running to abolish the union bureaucracy and return power to the rank and file as part of the fight by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to build a globally unified movement of workers to break the grip of the pro-corporate trade unions.



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